**Man of God**

**Someone whose presence, actions, and/or words are awe-inspiring and indicate the presence or activity of God.**

The expression “man of God” comes 73 times in the Scriptures, all but one in the Old Testament, 53 of them in 1 and 2 Kgs. It usually refers to a prophet. It appears a number of times in the mysterious narrative about an unnamed man of God who comes to declare Yahweh’s judgment on Jeroboam (1 Kgs 13:1-34). The man brings about the withering of the king’s hand and subsequently its healing. The term reappears in the story of Elijah as someone who is able to bring down fire from the sky to consume his would-be captors (2 Kgs 1:1-14). It features most frequently in stories about Elisha (2 Kgs 4:1 – 8:15), who is able (for instance) to multiply a widow’s supply of olive oil, promise an infertile woman that she will have a son and then revive him when he dies, purify poisonous food, cleanse Naaman of his skin ailment, warn the Ephraimite king about the Syrians’ war plans, and promise that the Syrian siege of Samaria will fail.

The term thus suggests a distinctively awe-inspiring, even frightening person. His arrival may mean good news or bad news, but either way it will suggest something extraordinary that confronts human expectations. It implies an openness between the heavens and the earth and it suggests someone who will act or speak in a way that brings about something supernatural. In the case of Elisha, at least, it suggests that the person is not merely someone through whom God speaks or acts from time to time, but one in whose being supernatural power has come to reside.

Before the references to prophets, the term first comes significantly on the lips of Samson’s mother when she is describing a supernatural figure who has appeared to her (Judg 13:6, 8). These occurrences make explicit that it denotes a person about whom there is something more than ordinarily human. It thus links with other indications that there is something more than the ordinary human in their words and/or actions or prophets, indications such as “prophesying” (which perhaps refers to something like speaking in tongues; e.g., 1 Sam 10:1-13) or behaving in a way that suggests the alighting of the spirit of Yahweh on them (e.g., Num 11:24-27).

The term is used occasionally to describe other leaders such as Moses (e.g., Deut 33:1) and David (e.g., Neh 12:24). It is then a general term that does not incorporate any reference to concrete actions. The one New Testament occurrence (1 Tim 6:11) has similar general reference. In Christian usage, it commonly denotes someone such as a priest, which fits the more general usage in the Bible. It can also denote an especially devout person, but the Bible does not use the expression with this implication.

—John Goldingay